

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A

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SUBJ: MINTOFF SPEECH TO THE NATION: ANTICLIMAX

REF: VALLETTA 1564

1. SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF'S BROADCAST TO THE NATION TURNED OUT TO BE A LOW KEY, SOMEWHAT MUTED PERFORMANCE. DESPITE CONSIDERABLE ADVANCE SPECULATION CONCERNING POSSIBLE POLITICAL FIREWORKS, THIS WAS NOT THE CASE. MAJOR POINTS WERE A CABINET RESHUFFLE, WHICH DID NOT PRODUCE A SINGLE NEW FACE IN THE MINTOFF GOVERNMENT, AND A SERIES OF ECONOMIC ANNOUNCEMENTS DESIGNED TO OFFSET THE EFFECT OF RISING FOOD AND ENERGY PRICES ON MALTESE INCOMES. THERE WAS NO MENTION OF CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES OR POSSIBLE REPLACEMENT OF THE GOVERNOR GENERAL. END SUMMARY.

2. MINTOFF'S RADIO AND TELEVISION ADDRESS LAST EVENING BEGAN WITH PAISE FOR HIS CURRENT TEAM OF MINISTERS AND PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES. MINTOFF SAID THAT THROUGH A REASSIGNMENT OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RESPONSIBILITIES HE NOW WANTED TO PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR

THE MEMBERS OF HIS GOVERNMENT TO OBTAIN WIDER EXPERIENCE AND FOR THE PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES TO RECEIVE JUST RECOGNITION AND REMUNERATION FOR THE JOBS THEY WERE DOING. THE VARIOUS CHANGES IN THE CABINET WHICH MINTOFF ANNOUNCED RESULTED EITHER IN THE DEPARTURE OF ANY MINISTERS, NOR IN THE ADDITION OF ANY NEW FACES TO HIS GOVERNMENT. THE REVISED MINISTERIAL LINEUP IS AS FOLLOWS:

(A) PRIME MINISTER/FOREIGN MINISTER - DOM MINTOFF (NO CHANGE)
(B) JUSTICE AND PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS - ANTON BUTTIGIEG (NO CHANGE)
(C) FINANCE AND CUSTOMS - JOSEPH ABELA (NO CHANGE)
(D) DEVELOPMENT PARLIAMTARY SECRETARY WISTI ABELA (FORMERLY HELD BY ALBERT HYZLER)
(E) LABOR, EMPLOYMENT AND WELFARE - AGATHA BARBARA (FORMERLY HELD BY JOSEPH CASSAR)
(F) EDUCATION AND CULTURE - JOSEPH CASSAR (FORMERLY HELD BY AGATHA BARBARA)
(G) HOUSING AND LA D - PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY PATRICK HOLLAND (A NEW MINISTRY, FORMERLY PART OF JUSTICE MINISTRY)
(H) HEALTH - ALBERT HYZLER (FORMERLY HELD BY DANIEL PISCOPO)
(8) AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES - PARLAIMENTARY SECRETARY SREDDIE MICALLEF (A NEW MINISTRY, FORMERLY PART OF THE TRADE, INDUSTRY, AGRICULTURE AND TOURISM MINISTRY)
(J) ELECTRICITY AND POSTS AND TELEPHONES - DANIEL PISCOPO (A NEW MINISTRY, FORMERLY PART OF THE DEVELOPMENT MINISTRH)
(K) PUBLIC BUILDING AND WORKS - LORRY SANT (NO CHANGE)
(L) TRADE, INDUSTRY AND TOURISM AA PAUL XUEREB (NO CHANGE)
THERE HAD BEEN RUMORS THAT ONE OR MORE MINISTERS MIGHT LEAVE THE CABINET, EITHER BECAUSE OF DISAGREEMENTS WITH MINTOFF, OR DISSATISFACTION ON HIS PART WITH THEIR PERFORMANCE. HOWEVER, AT LEAST FOR THE MOMENT, THIS HAS NOT HAPPENED.

3. MINTOFF THEN MOVED ON TO ANNOUNCE REDUCTIONS IN THE PRICES OF VARIOUS FUEL AND UTILITY COSTS IN MALTA, POINTING OUT THAT THESE REDUITITNS WERE POSSIBLE IN LARGE MEASURE BECAUSE OF:
(A) A NEW TWENTY-YEAR, FIVE MILLION DOLLAR INTEREST-FREE LOAN WHICH MALTA HAD OBTAINED FROM SAUDI ARABIA; (B) THE RECENTLY SIGNED TEN MILLION DOLLAR OIL EXPLORATION AGREEMENT WITH TEXACO; AND (C) A RECENT SUEL STORAGE AGREEMENT BETWEEN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MALTA AND THE UNITED KINGDOM. MINTOFF ANNOUNCED SPECIFIC REDUCTIONS, EFFECTIVE OCTOBER FIRST, IN THE PIIES OF BOTTLED GAS (LARGELY FOR HOUSEHOLD USE), ELECTRICITY (FOR BOTH DOMESTIC AND INDUSTRIAL USERS) AND DIESEL FUEL.

4. ALONG WITH THESE REDUCTIONS, MINTOFF EMPHASIZED THE CONTINUING NEED FOR FUEL CONSERVATION IN MALTA BECAUSE OF THE WORLD PETROLEUM PRICE AND SUPPLY SITUATION. ALSO HE POINTEDLY

DID NOT, AS MOST MALTESE HAD HOPED, MENTION EVEN THE FUTURE POSSIBILITY OF A REDUCTION IN MALTA'S HIGH PRICE OF GASOLINE.

5. MINTOFF ALSO ANNOUNCED THE INSTITUTION OF A NEW SYSTEM OF FAMILY ALLOWANCES, WHICH WILL PROVIDE SMALL WEEKLY PAYMENTS ON A DECLINING SCALE FOR THE FIRST THROUGH THE THIRD CHILD IN EACH FAMILY. MINTOFF ADDED THAT, IN VIEW OF THE WORLD POPULATION PROBLEM, IT WOULD NOT BE APPROPRIATE TO PAY ALLOWANCES FOR MORE THAN THREE CHILDREN. UNTIL APRIL 1975 THESE ALLOWANCES WILL BE FINANCED DIRECTLY BY THE GOVERNMENT, BUT AFTER THAT DATE THEY WILL BE INCORPORATED INTO MALTA'S SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM, WHICH INVOLVES EMPLOYEE AND EMPLOYER CONTRIBUTIONS AS WELL AS GOVERNMENT PAYMENTS.

6. MINTOFF ALSO ANNOUNCED A 1974 CHRISTMAS BONUS FOR GOVERNMENT WORKERS AND PARASTATAL EMPLOYEES OF TWENTY MALTESE POUNDS, AND APPEALED TO PRIVATE EMPLOYERS TO FOLLOW SUIT; AS WELL AS A FIVE POUND INCENTIVE BONUS FOR DRYDOCKS EMPLOYEES BECAUSE OF MORE EFFICIENT WORK PRACTICES AT THE DOCKS.

7. OTHER GOVERNMENT PLANS MENTIONED BY MINTOFF INCLUDE THE INTRODUCTION OF A REVISED, SUBSIDIZED BREAD RATION PROCEDURE TO BE BASED ON A NEW NATIONAL IDENTITY CARD SYSTEM AND A NEW FOUR MALTESE POUND PER WEEK GRANT SYSTEM FOR THOSE HANDICAPPED PERSONS OVER SIXTEEN YEARS OF AGE.

8. MINTOFF ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY THE MINIMUM WAGE FOR WOMEN IN PRIVATE INDUSTRY IN MALTA WILL BE NOT LESS THAN 80 PER CENT SAME AS FOR MEN DOING THE SAME JOB. THIS WILL RISE TO 90 PER CENT BY APRIL 1975 AND 100 PER CENT BY APRIL 1976. HE EMPHASIZED THAT THE MALTESE GOVERNMENT ALREADY WAS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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USING THE EQUAL PAY SYSTEM.

9. FINALLY, SPENDING OF THE UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEM, MINTOFF STATED THAT BY THE END OF DECEMBER THERE WOULD BE 780 EXTRA JOBS AMONG GOVERNMENT OFFICES, BANKS AND THE DRYDOCKS, WHILE HE HOPED THAT NEW INDUSTRIES WOULD PROVIDE AN ADDITIONAL 300 JOBS. HE ADDED THAT SEVERAL NEW PROJECTS EVENTUALLY WOULD ABSORB OTHER WORKS, SUCH AS THE 388,000 TON TANKER DRYDOCK BEING BUILT BY THE CHINESE, AND A NEW GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED DRYDOCK AT MARSA FOR 40,000 TO 90,000 TON TANKERS.

10. MINTOFF CLOSED BY APPEALING TO HARD WORK AND COOPERATION TO HELP ATTRACT ADDITIONAL FOREIGN INVESTMENT TO MALTA, WHICH WAS NEEDED TO STRENGTHEN INDUSTRY AND TOURISM FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE NATION'S ECONOMIC WELL-BEING.

11. COMMENT: DESPITE THE AID OF POLITICAL FIREWORKS, MINTOFF DID PRESENT A COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC PACKAGE DESIGNED TO OFFER SPECIFIC BENEFITS TO MOST MALTESE AND, IN THIS SENSE, HIS ADDRESS APPEARED DESIGNED TO BOLSTER HIS GOVERNMENT'S STANDING AMONG THE ELECTORATE AS ELECTION TIME BEGINS TO APPROACH. THE CABINET CHANGES WERE GENERALLY EXPECTED, AND THEREFORE NOT SURPRISING. MORE CONTROVERSIAL QUESTIONS SUCH AS CHANGES IN THE CONSTITUTION HAVE APPARENTLY BEEN POSTPONED BY MINTOFF UNTIL AFTER THE RE-OPENING OF PARLIAMENT IN MID-OCTOBER. IN VIEW OF A CONSIDERABLE BUILDUP FOR MINTOFF'S SPEECH, THERE WAS A CERTAIN DEGREE OF LET-DOWN AND ANTICLIMAX ABOUT IT AS DELIVERED. THE OVERALL DECIBEL LEVEL DID NOT EVEN BEGIN TO APPROACH THAT OF HIS EARLIER "CRISIS PERFORMANCE", AND IN THIS SENSE PROBABLY SAME AS A RELIEF TO MANY MALTESE ON BOTH SIDES OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM. SMITH

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